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Chapter One

[image]

The sunlight beamed into the nursery, causing a bright ray of sunshine to land straight in Twilightkit's eye. She grumbled and turned her back to the den entrance, burying her head in her mother's hazelnut-colored fur. She and her littermates were CanopyClan cats- cats who live in the canopies of the trees.

For seasons they've lived there and no cat knows any other place they could call home. Most CanopyClan cats are small and nimble for navigating the tree tops. They typically have long whiskers and brown short-furred pelts to blend into the treetops.
"Twilightkit, you're squishing me!" Twilightkit's brother, Duskkit whined, squirming.

"Sorry Duskkit!" she quickly got to her paws and stepped accidentally on Dawnkit's tail.

"Ow- *Twilightkit!*" Dawnkit grumbled, glaring at Twilightkit.

"Sorry Dawnkit." Twilightkit backed up and made sure she wasn't going to step or bump into anybody else. She ducked her head as her mother, Honeydew, bent over and licked the top of her head.

"How about all of you get up and go explore the camp? Sunnyhorizon needs some quiet time. Especially because she's due anytime now. Most likely today. Plus you guys are old enough now to explore all the dens. How about you go ask Jaybounce to teach you how to climb properly, hm?"

"Okay!" Daykit mewed enthusiastically, bouncing out of the den. Twilightkit and her littermates scrambled after Daykit, excited to get out of the den.

Their father, Jaybounce, was usually out patrolling. He seemed to get annoyed easily but that didn't bother Twilightkit. He was probably just tired after all the patrols. At least that's what

Honeydew says. The only few times they left the nursery was when Honeydew and a few of the other queens were watching them closely.

"Jaybounce!" Daykit squealed excitedly. Twilightkit quickly rubbed against him and looked up at him, eyes wide with excitement.

"Honeydew said that you're going to teach us how to climb!" Duskkit piped up, ears perked. He saw a leaf fall and quickly pounced on it before looking at Jaybounce for his response.

"Erm- I'm sorry kits. I have to go hunt for the clan so that every cat can eat." He lifted the paw Twilightkit rubbed against and quickly licked it before setting it down.

"I'm sure someone could take your place, Jaybounce." Honeydew said through narrowed eyes, sitting at the nursery entrance. Twilightkit tilted her head at her mother's tone. It wasn't hostile but she seemed upset with Jaybounce for some reason.

"*Right*. Yes, I'll go ask." He murmured, heading to the warrior den before padding out a few heartbeats later. He glanced at Honeydew before looking at the kits. "So, what am I doing again?"

Daykit's tail lifted excitedly, "You're going to teach us how to climb properly and safely!" she squeaked.

"Yeah!" Twilightkit piped in.

"Well, personally, I think you all are *too* young to learn how to climb and certainly too small. Even for the training branches." Jaybounce said, gaze flickering to Honeydew and his eyes narrowed slightly.

"I'm sure they'll be fine. Be a good father and teach them how to climb, like any other father would." Honeydew said, tail tip twitching in annoyance.

He sighed and reluctantly nodded. "*Very well*." he grumbled, walking over to the training branches with a small line of kits behind him.

Twilightkit was at the back of the line and frowned. She wasn't sure if her littermates noticed but she certainly did. Both her parents seemed upset at each other. Plus Jaybounce never seemed to want to be with her littermates and her. He always came up with an excuse. Did he not like them? She shook her head. Of course he loved them!

The Training Branches was a little spot in the camp located by the apprentices' den that warriors made out of branches and sticks that were found on the forest floor. It was made for older kits and younger apprentices to teach them how to climb properly before they set out training in the trees. CanopyClan kits must show they know how to climb and what to do if they fall before they can start training in the trees as an apprentice. Once they pass that test, then they can hunt and fight in the treetops.

Jaybounce sat down and waited for Daykit, Duskkit, Dawnkit, and Twilightkit to sit down and calm themselves a little. Once they were all settled, he cleared his throat. "Before I teach you how to properly climb, I must go over a few rules. First of all, always pay attention to where you place your paws. Paw placement is extremely important and an inexperienced cat can easily lose footing, tumble to the ground, and break their leg. Secondly, pay attention to your surroundings and remember them. If you're chasing a squirrel, keep an eye on everything around you. You don't want your eye to get poked out from a twig that was hanging down. This next rule is super important. You kits are listening, right?" He said, studying each of them before continuing. "You must never- and I mean *never* leave the camp to go climbing before you're old enough. Even when you're old enough, always bring a friend. Don't go out alone. Is that understood?" His eyes were dark and Twilightkit swore she could see a hint of grief in them as he waited for each of them to nod.

"Why? I mean I know we can fall but what's the worst that can happen?" Twlightkit asked, head tilted. Jaybounce's eyes darted straight to her, eyes narrowing slightly.

"Everything can happen. If you fall out of that tree without anyone *experienced* to help you out, you'll break your bones and then a fox will stumble upon you and eat you. Or worse." He turned his head

away and took a deep breath before straightening himself out.

Twilightkit blinked, a little confused. What could be worse than being eaten by a fox? She shrugged and turned her attention back to her father. Surely, it couldn't be that important.

". . . and you always want to listen to me or a warrior for instructions. Stick to these rules and you'll be set for warriorhood. Any questions before we begin?"

Duskkit stood up, tail straight in the air, "No questions here, Jaybounce! Let's start. Please?" He begged as Dawnkit jumped on top of him, batting his ear. Duskkit squealed excitedly and toppled to the ground with Dawnkit.

Twilightkit laughed and looked to see Jaybounce's reaction. He watched with annoyance in his eyes and he rolled his eyes. Twilightkit frowned, what was the matter with her father? Why wasn't he as excited to teach as they were to learn?

Daykit did a little bounce over Duskkit and Dawnkit and grinned up at her father. "I'm ready! I'll follow all the rules!" she squeaked and Twilightkit bounded over too, ready to learn.

Jaybounce gave a soft smile at Daykit before nodding, "Alright, you can go first then." He picked her up gently by the scruff and set her down at the base of the Training Branches.

Dawnkit and Duskkit finished their little scuffle and sat behind Twilightkit, fidgeting with every little thing that they could reach– including Twilightkit's tail.

"Stop fidgeting, will ya?" Twilightkit said, moving her tail to wrap around her side and guarding it with her paw, glaring at Duskkit. "I'm trying to see what Jaybounce is telling Daykit."

"Sorry Twilightkit. I just feel like I could run five times around the entire territory and all the way back!"

"Well then mess with your own tail or Dawnkit's tail. Just leave my tail out of it." she grumbled, turning her head back to Daykit and Jaybounce.

"Hey, wait– no Duskkit! Not my tail!" she heard Dawnkit's voice squeak and Twilightkit swallowed back laughter. They could be annoying but they were her littermates and she loved them dearly.

"I did it! I did it Jaybounce! Did you see?" Daykit squealed in joy and pride. When Twilightkit turned to see what happened, Daykit was sitting at the top of the branches, standing tall and proud like when Flyingstar makes announcements on the Broad Branch.

"I did. Great job, Daykit." He purred proudly, affection in his eyes. "Now do you remember what I said about climbing down? I know you could easily jump down, but when you're up in the trees, it won't be like that." Jaybounce backed up a little, giving Daykit space to climb down.

Daykit nodded eagerly and hooked her claws into the spot that her hindlegs were at and let her body dangle for a few heartbeats before getting both her back legs hooked into the branch. She slowly moved her way down till she was in what Jaybounce considered "the safe-landing zone" which is when it was safe to leap off the tree without injury.

"Great job!" Jaybounce praised, nuzzling Daykit's shoulder.

Daykit's eyes were shining and her tail was high up in the air. Twilightkit felt a twinge of jealousy. She wanted to have Jaybounce's praise too! "My turn!" she said, walking forward.

Jaybounce turned to her and frowned but he nodded. "Very well. First you want to approach the 'tree' and then–"

He was cut off by Twilightkit immediately rushing forward and reaching up with her paw. Her sister was showing off. It couldn't be *that* hard, could it? She was doing well at first, making it half way up the Training Branches but then she got cocky and began to go faster. When her claw got stuck, she pulled it out, and let out a shocked yelp when the force of pulling it back made her fall. Twilightkit expected her father to grab her scruff when she was falling but she hit the ground and let out a whimper.

She rolled to her paws, licking her paw that got caught, and looking

for Jaybounce. He had moved farther away from the branches and was staring at her with disappointment and annoyance.

Turning to her littermates, he'd mew, "And that's an example of what *not* to do or be like. I'm adding another rule which is don't show off or you'll wretch a claw like she did." Turning to Twilightkit, he said "Go to the medicine hollow and get that paw fixed up. Until you learn about showing off, I won't allow you to go near these branches. Understood?" He used a stern voice that made Twilightkit feel ashamed of herself.

"Y-yes Jaybounce." She stammered before being shooed to the medicine hollow. Twilightkit limped over, glancing as her littermates were having a blast. *Daykit was showing off and she didn't get in trouble. Just because I got hurt, I was told off! That's not fair*. She thought to herself bitterly.

When she walked into the medicine hollow, she winced at the pungent herb scent that hit her nose. How could any cat live in here? "H-hello?" She whispered, looking around the empty herb store. Normally kits were told to wait outside but she had always wondered what it looked like inside. "Tatteredleaf? Are you here?" "I thought all queens told their kits not to go into the herb store." A deep voice behind her made Twilightkit squeak.

When she turned around, she saw the silhouette of the medicine cat and her fur spiked. "I'm so sorry! I didn't see you around so I thought you were in here– and I really wanted to see what was in here. But it's so boring! I don't know why any kit would want to come in here. Sorry if that was rude!"

Tatteredleaf let out a small chuckle and purred in amusement. Her voice softened, "You're not in trouble little one and I don't expect you to be interested in herbs. What's the reason you were looking for me?"

"O-oh! Jaybounce was teaching us how to climb and he said that I wretched my claw and to see you."

"Go wait outside, I'll get something for it." Tatteredleaf grabbed Twilightkit and moved her into a small nest that was outside the

hollow before going in herself.

Barely a few minutes later, Tatteredleaf came out with a bundle of herbs and dropped them in front of Twilightkit. Twilightkit sniffed them and reeled back at the smell. They all smelled tangy and bitter.

"How do you even tell the difference between them all?" She asked as the medicine cat began to chew the leaves up.

"When you first learn about them, you start with appearances. Some leaves are pointy while others are more round. Then once you can identify those by looks, we move onto scents. Some are bitter or tangy or sweet. Each one is unique!" She rolled her eyes. "You got me on a whole tangent about silly healing leaves. Let me finish treating your paw." Tatteredleaf finished dressing Twilightkit's paw then studying it to make sure she didn't miss anything. "Make sure to stay off of it for a little while. Come back tomorrow when you wake up so I can make sure it won't get infected."

Twilightkit lifted her paw to observe it before nodding. "Thank you!" She said as she headed back to the Training Branches, limping. Maybe she couldn't *try* them, but she certainly could watch!

When she sat down next to Daykit, Duskkit was currently trying to climb it– barely –but climbing it. She could tell Jaybounce was getting impatient. Especially when he ended up picking Duskkit up by the scruff and placing him at the top. He told Duskkit about being quick and sure of himself before helping him climb down. When Jaybounce turned to place him by Daykit, his eyes narrowed on Twilightkit. Setting down Duskkit, he stood over her.

"Didn't I tell you to go to the medicine cat and stay away from these branches?" The dark look from when earlier returned when he looked at her. It had a weird hint of grief and regret to it. Or at least that's what she thought it was.

"Well I assumed you meant I had to be more than a few pawsteps away. You have big paws so it only takes you 3 steps from here to there but for me, it's like 15! Plus, aren't I allowed to watch my

littermates try?"

"Twilightkit. Go to the nursery and rest your paw." When she was about to protest, his voice hardened, "*Now Twilightkit.*"

She hesitated for a few heartbeats, looking between her littermates. They all looked disappointed at her leaving and sad. "Fine." she said before turning away and heading to the nursery.

It was fine. It really was. If Jaybounce didn't want to hang out with her, at least Honeydew would. Plus maybe she could see Sunnyhorizon's new kits if they've arrived!

As if StarClan read her mind, Honeydew charged out of the den. "They're coming! Sunnyhorrizon's kits are coming!" she yowled before charging back into the den. Chaos was enfolding in the camp now.

Everyone was slowly starting to group around the nursery, excited. The camp was loud with chattering– it felt like the clan was an entire flock of robins just waking up in the morning.

Slowly, Twilightkit was pushed farther and farther away from the nursery and all the way to the back of the clearing. She grumbled some words under her breath but then went to look for her littermates and Jaybounce. When she tried to shove through the crowd and it didn't work, she tried to find the highest points in camp. By luck, she was right by the Training Branches.

Taking a deep breath, she scrambled up onto the branches and managed to make it to the top. *See Jaybounce? Daykit isn't the only one who can climb.* She thought as she made it to the top.

Standing tall, she managed to look over the crowd. *What's so special about this litter? Why is everyone so excited? Was the clan this excited for her and her littermates?*

Staring at the nursery after what felt like moons, Tatteredleaf padded out. Everyone went silent and seemed to be holding their breath. The medicine cat was silent for a few heartbeats before shaking her head sadly. Almost as soon as she shook her head,

everyone dispersed and went back to what they were doing.

What was that all about? She thought as she jumped off the branches. Looking around, she saw Daykit getting more praise from Jaybounce and Duskkit and Dawnkit both tackling each other. Twilightkit rolled her eyes and headed towards the nursery to ask about what had just happened.

When Twilightkit arrived, she saw Tatteredleaf crouched above one of the kits.

"Tatteredleaf? Is that kit okay?" she asked, head tilted.

Her eyes turned to Twilightkit, a little grief in them, "One of Sunnyhorizon's kits died." she nudged the limp kit, "Sometimes StarClan decides to take a life so early. But there's nothing we can do about it."

"Oh. . ." she stared at the motionless kit. Why would StarClan want to take a life so early? "Also, what was all that about— when everyone gathered around the nursery and then seemed upset when you shook your head?"

Tatteredleaf's ears perked, "Oh that. No cat was supposed to know about it but I had received a prophecy about a cat. One who's yet to be born. It's not a big deal, just the cat would be my apprentice. They're supposed to have a leg disability but so far no kit has had one. I told someone and now the clan can't help but get excited for every litter."

So they must've been excited like that when me and my littermates were born. "How do you know they'll be born with it? They could hurt their leg in their lifetime, right?" What Jaybounce told her echoed in her head, *". . . you'll break your bones and a fox will eat you, or worse."* Twilightkit remembered the dark look in his eyes. Had something happened before?

Tatteredleaf looked thoughtful, "Perhaps you're right. I guess we'll find out." She smiled softly at Twilightkit. "Why don't you go find something for Sunnyhorizon to eat so she can nurse your new denmates?"

"Okay!" Twilightkit's tail shot up in the air and she bounded over to the fresh kill pile, trying her best not to trip any cat. Looking at the pile, she saw a finch that was almost as big as her. *That'll fill Sunnyhorizon up!*

Trying her best, Twilightkit dragged the finch to the nursery. When she made it back, Tatteredleaf wasn't in there anymore. She shrugged. The medicine cat was probably doing something with the dead kit. Pausing at the entrance, she let her eyes adjust before shoving the finch in and moving it in front of Sunnyhorizon.

"I brought you something to eat! Tatteredleaf said you'd need food to feed your kits. Speaking of them, can I see them? What are their names?"

Sunnyhorizon had a soft but tired smile. She seemed sad. The queen moved her tail, revealing two little kits. "I've named them Crackedkit and Distortedkit."

Twilightkit's eyes widened. What horrible names! "Why would you name them that? Neither of them look cracked or distorted. That makes no sense."

Sunnyhorizon went silent and Honeydew scooped up Twilightkit, setting her in her paws and started to groom her. "Shhhh. You're being loud. Let Sunnyhorizon get some rest." Twilightkit's mother said softly.

"Oh. Okay." She whispered back before ducking and squirming away from her mother's grooming. After a few moments, Jaybounce was back on her mind. "Why was Jaybounce so serious about going out with an experienced climber? I mean he said why but he said there was something worse than breaking your bones and getting eaten by a fox. What does he mean by that? What could be worse than being eaten by a fox?"

Honeydew went silent for a few heartbeats, thinking of what to say. "Well. . . when your father was younger– an apprentice to be exact, he had a close friend of his. Really close. She was his best friend since kithood and when they both decided to sneak out of camp one day, there was an accident. They were hanging out in the Squirrel

Oak, right near the top and it was a gathering night. The two of them were playing when they heard a loud boom in the sky. There were clusters of stars exploding. I saw it too, at the gathering though. Every once and awhile you may see it or hear it. Anyways, they had never seen it before and it really scared them both. In a panic, she ended up trying to scramble down the tree quickly but she didn't pay attention to where she was placing her paws and well. . . you can guess what happened. Jaybounce thinks she would have survived if they had the medicine cat there or someone who knew what to do. If she did survive. . ." Honeydew trailed off and shook her head. "Why aren't you out hanging with your littermates?"

Twilightkit was processing what her mother said. What did she mean by 'If she did survive'? Her ears perked up at the question and she frowned, "I messed up climbing and hurt my paw so Jaybounce banned me from the Training Branches and told me to stay with you till I learned my lesson about 'showing off'. But I promise I wasn't trying to Honeydew! Well, I was, but Daykit was too! She just didn't hurt herself so it was fine apparently. He's all about her though. Like he gets annoyed at the rest of us but with Daykit, he's totally different! It's not fair." she whined, climbing on her mother's back and batting her ear.

"Did he now?" Honeydew growled slightly. "I'll talk to him. Go play with Duskkit and Dawnkit. Just make sure to be careful with your paw."

"Okay!" Twilightkit slid down Honeydew's back and bounced out of the nursery, keeping weight off of her injured paw.

As soon as she left the nursery, she heard her name. "Twilightkit! Over here!" Twilightkit instantly recognized Duskkit's voice and her head turned towards it.

"Hi Duskkit!" she said, plopping down next to him. "Where's Dawnkit and Daykit?"

"Dawnkit and Daykit are with Jaybounce right now. He's giving them 'special training' because they were able to do it on the first try." he grumbled, glancing towards the branches.

"That's not fair! Did you tell Jaybounce?"

"Yeah. He said I should wait to try them again so I don't hurt myself even though I never did. I just took my time."

"Honeydew told me why he's so paranoid about us climbing and those kinds of things." Twilightkit said, watching both of her littermates race each other.

"Why?" Duskkit asked with a twinge of curiosity in his eyes.

"It's because his best friend from apprenticehood died from not watching where she put her paws. On the Squirrel Oak. She got scared and tried to rush down but misplaced her paws and fell."

"Oh. I guess that explains it. But that still doesn't mean he can just stop us from climbing— we're CanopyClan cats! The only clan who knows how to navigate the treetops!" He puffed out his chest in pride which caused Twilightkit to giggle.

"Yeah! Who's he to tell us what to do? He's always patrolling anyways. It's not like he can stop us from using them!" She added, straightening herself out and making herself seem taller.

"Wait. Twilightkit. I just had an idea. If we REALLY want to show him that we're as good as any other CanopyClan cat and that he can't boss us around. . ." he cut himself off, glancing side-to-side before leaning closer and lowering his voice, "we should sneak out tonight and climb around where nobody will see us."

Her eyes lit up but she quickly shook her head. "That's a really bad idea. What if we do fall? Then nobody would be able to see us and a fox *would* eat us if we didn't bleed to death first. I don't want to die being known as the finch-brained kits and our story used as an example of what *not* to do. Jaybounce already used me as it once– I don't want the entire clan for generations to use me and you as it too!"

"But, if we do succeed-"

"We'll be scolded, Flyingstar would want our tails, and our ceremony would be held back by like 12 moons!"

Duskkit went silent for a few moments before shaking his head sadly, "Fine. You don't have to come. I still will though. And you better not rat me out! If you do, I won't talk to you for an entire season or five!" He said before storming off.

Twilightkit blinked, watching him walk off. Surely he'll be fine. Right? *StarClan will protect him. I know they have his back.* She thought to herself before turning to the Training Branches. She didn't need to prove to her father that she could climb fine by sneaking out, she'd just show him now.

Twilightkit bounced over to her littermates and Jaybounce, ears perked.

Jaybounce muttered something under his breath before turning to Twilightkit, "did you loose your ears? I told you to-"

"No I didn't! I heard you loud and clear. Honeydew told me to go play and hang out with my littermates. So here I am. And before you tell me to hang out with Duskkit, I already did and he went to the nursery." She said, chest puffed out in confidence.

Jaybounce glanced at Daykit and Dawnkit before sighing. "Twilightkit, follow me. I need to talk to you."

Confusion lit her eyes. What did he need? What was he going to tell her? If it was about being safe, she'd be very disappointed.

Twilightkit shrugged and followed. He was taking her to a hidden part of the camp that was good for private conversations. He sat down and curled his tail neatly around his paws after beckoning her to sit next to him.

It felt weird— being so close to a cat she felt she barely knew. He'd barely check up on them and today was the first day he really paid any special attention to them.

"Listen, I know you probably think that I'm being unreasonable and unfair to you and Duskkit. I'm not trying to make you guys seem more like CaveClan cats than CanopyClan cats. I just want to keep you guys safe. There was an accident when I was younger and I

don't want you two to end up like a cat I knew and cared for dearly. When I'm telling you that you shouldn't go near the Training Branches, it's because I don't want you to end up getting hurt because you want to show off. The sooner you learn not to take risks, the better. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

She hesitated before speaking, "Yes, I do." Twilightkit felt a weird sense of guilt. She wasn't sure if it was because she knew exactly what Duskkit was going to do and she couldn't tell anyone or if it was because she knew exactly what happened to that cat her father was talking about.

"Good. I'm glad we're on the same branch here." Jaybounce gave her a genuine smile before standing up.

"Wait, Jaybounce?"

"Hm?" He turned to look down at her

"Can I please try again? When Sunnyhorizon's kits were coming and everyone was gathered, I climbed up them to try to see what was going on and I did it successfully. I won't show off this time, I promise!" She pleaded, making her eyes as wide as they could go.

Jaybounce chuckled and rolled his eyes, "Alright. I'll give ya another shot. Come on, I need to make sure Dawnkit and Daykit don't hurt themselves somehow."

Satisfied, she followed after him, a bounce in her step as she walked. Glancing towards the nursery, she spotted Duskkit watching her, a glint of what she assumed was jealousy in his eyes. Twilightkit slowed down to a stop and her tail lowered slightly. *I should ask if he can get another shot too. If Jaybounce said yes, then Duskkit wouldn't need to go out of camp tonight!*

"One more thing Jaybounce, can Duskkit get another chance too? I'd feel bad if I got to go again but he didn't. . ." She asked while running forward to catch up with him.

"No. Not right now. Three is enough for me to handle. If he's with your mother, then he'll be fine." Jaybounce spoke, not even looking

towards her or anyone, just straight ahead.

"Oh. Okay." She felt like she shouldn't go then. *It wouldn't be fair to him.* But she also wanted to prove to Jaybounce that she was good enough to use them without supervision from him. *Jaybounce is right. He's with Honeydew so he'll be fine. I'll just tell him when I'm done about it so he won't try to go out because he'll know that tomorrow he can go at it again.*

Feeling justified to go anyways, she continued walking towards the Training Branches, avoiding his gaze.

"Twilightkit!" She heard Dawnkit squeak and right after, being shoved to the ground.

"Hi Dawnkit! Jaybounce said I could try it again!" She batted her brother's nose and he got off of her. She smoothed down her fur and turned to the branches.

"Let's try this again, Twilightkit. And this time *pleas*e listen to-"

Before he could end his sentence, Twilightkit approached the branches and bunched up her muscles, digging her claws into the bark and heaving herself upwards. This time she slowed down and didn't care if she was doing better than Daykit or not. She just wanted to get to the top. Pausing for a few heartbeats to catch her breath, she eventually made it and was at eye level with Jaybounce. Her tail shot up and she stood tall and proudly.

Jaybounce seemed to be in shock for a few seconds before shaking his head. "You did well, but it'd be better if you actually *listened* next time rather than completely ignoring what I was going to tell you and going how you think it's done."
"Okay. I'll wait next time." Twilightkit said, rolling her eyes.

"Come on kits, the sun is starting to sink. You should be getting to bed or at least stay in the nursery." Jaybounce said, glancing at the sky.

Twilightkit blinked, confused. It wasn't even close to dusk! It was just barely after sunhigh. Was Jaybounce blind? Whatever. She

could tell Duskkit about what Jaybounce said.

When they arrived at the nursery, Duskkit was on his back, pawing at the air. "Duskkit!" Twilightkit squealed, sliding down next to him.

"Hi Twilightkit." he said, his voice not being the usual bubbly and optimistic one he did.

"Hey, I know you saw me climbing the Training Branches again but I asked Jaybounce and he said you can tomorrow-" lowering her voice she added, "-you won't have to sneak out tonight to prove your worthiness."

Duskkit's eyes widened, "Wait, really?"

"Yeah really!"

Twilightkit could see the indecision in his eyes.

"Well..."
"Oh come on. You can't seriously still be considering it!"
"Of course I'm not! But there's a part of me that still wants to see what it looks like."

"Duskkit, it won't be *that* long till we're six moons. We're already three. Surely you can wait? That's like... some amount of quarter moons. You get it. It's not that far at all!"

"Yeah. I know. Don't worry. I won't go." He flashed her a grin but something in his eyes told her that he had other plans.

You have to trust him. You're closer to him than Dawnkit and Daykit. He wouldn't lie to you. She told herself, grinning back at him.

Duskkit laid up against Honeydew, who was grooming Dawnkit's leaf-filled fur. Twilightkit laid right next to him, resting her head down by his, a small purr rising in her throat. She knew whatever happened in the future, he'd always be by her side. And no matter what, she'd be by his.

* * *

It was dark out and the wind was whistling. Twilightkit could hear the leaves scraping up against each other and the branches on the trees creaking. She was sitting next to Duskkit, high up in the trees. He seemed older and when she looked at herself, her paws were bigger. They were warriors! When she glanced at her brother, he was frowning. She nudged him playfully and he smiled slightly but the smile quickly vanished.

"What's wrong Duskbreeze? You seem upset." *Duskbreeze? How did I know his name is Duskbreeze?* She thought to herself, a little surprised.

"It's... It's nothing. Don't worry about it."

"Tell me. I'm your sister. We've been with each other since the end. You can talk to me. *Please* tell me."

His eyes suddenly widened and he stared at Twilightkit with huge eyes. "Help. Help me Twilight-" He backed up and fell off the branch they were perched on and when she darted forward to save him, she watched him reach out for her while disappearing into the darkness.

"DUSKBREEZE!" She yowled and right after hearing his name, she heard yaps that she somehow knew were from foxes. And not long after that, she heard him cry out in pain.

"I'm so sorry. I should've been there..." tears began to build up and she woke up, her face wet. When Twilightkit looked around, Daykit and Dawnkit were huddled next to her and Honeydew was fast asleep– along with Sunnyhorizon and her kits.

Where did Duskkit go? As soon as the thought occurred, she realized what had happened. Struck with horror, she got to her paws and nudged Honeydew awake.

"What's the matter Twilightkit?" Honeydew asked drowsily.

"Duskkit... It's Duskkit. He's not... he's gone. Honeydew, I don't know where Duskkit is." She broke down into tears and her mother's eyes widened as she processed what Twillightkit had said.

Chapter Two

[image]

Honeydew carefully moved Dawnkit and Daykit away from her before jumping to her paws and racing out of the nursery.

"What's going on?" Dawnkit asked sleepily

Twilightkit didn't want to lie to him but she didn't want to reveal that she knew where Duskkit had gone. "Duskkit is missing. He wasn't there when I woke up and I told Honeydew."

"Where could he have gone?" Daykit asked, still half-asleep.

"I think that's where Honeydew went to find out." Dawnkit mumbled.

Twilightkit padded out of the clearing, guilt running down her spine. She should have known that he'd do it anyway. It was all her fault that he was missing.

The dream flashed in her mind again and she felt like there was a lump in her throat. Was it partly true? Had he actually fallen and became a fox snack?

"Twilightkit! Wake up!" Daykit cuffed her ear. "Stop daydreaming. Look– Honeydew is yelling at Jaybounce!"

Twilightkit blinked, turning her gaze to where Daykit was pointing to. Was Honeydew blaming Jaybounce? She wanted to get closer to them to see what they were arguing about.

"Stay there, I'll be right back!" She said, beginning to silently pad closer

"Wait Twilightkit! What if you get in trouble for eavesdropping?" She heard Dawnkit's worried voice behind her.

"I just won't get caught!" With that, she began to get closer, slipping

underneath a low hanging branch covered in leaves.

"I don't care if it was dangerous or not! They're kits! They *need* to learn how to climb if they want to become apprentices." Honeydew spat. "Just because the cat you actually wanted to have kits with died, doesn't mean you can stop my kits from trying to be CanopyClan cats. It also doesn't mean you can force them to do things! You're their father, not their leader."

"I'm just trying to protect them! And yeah, so what if I wanted kits with her? Does it really matter now? Now that I've had kits with a squirrel-brained molly like you? No, no it doesn't. Don't blame me for Duskkit's disappearance. It's not like he'd be any big contribution to the clan-"

"Don't you even dare say that!" Honeydew's hackles lifted and she thrusted her face just a mouse length away from his. "You're a heartless tom! You think it's not obvious about how little you care for them but I feel as if they can tell themselves. They're kits Jaybounce, not mice. So how about you be a decent father and treat them like they're yours."

"I'm not heartless! I just don't care about them as much as you do. Is that really so hard to believe? I didn't love you. I just hoped that having kits with you would ease my grief. That was the worst mistake I've made."

Honeydew went silent and Twilightkit was in disbelief. Jaybounce loved them. He had to. He was just mad because Duskkit was missing. That was all.

Finally, Honeydew spoke, her voice shaking slightly. "At least help me find him. *Please*. I don't know where he went and I don't want to leave my kits alone."

There was brief hesitation before he spoke, "Fine. But only for today. If he's really out of the camp, he won't last another day."

Twilightkit held her breath before padding out from her hiding spot, "I... I think I know where he went."

Honeydew's eyes widened and Jaybounce blinked a few times, surprised.

"Twilightkit. How long have you been there?" She casted a panicked glance at Jaybounce but he had a blank expression.

"N-not long at all! I just saw you guys talking so I came over and I heard you say you didn't know where he was." She lied. She didn't want her mother to worry about what she may have heard.

There was a flash of relief in her eyes but it was replaced by worry and a little curiosity. "What do you mean you think you know where he is?"

"Well... He was upset when Jaybounce said that he couldn't climb anymore and we talked about how Jaybounce couldn't tell us what to do." She looked away from Jaybounce guiltily and continued, "and he thought about sneaking out of camp to prove to Jaybounce that we were worthy." When she saw her parents' expressions, she quickly added, "I insisted we didn't because even if we didn't die, our apprenticeship would be held back 15 moons! I even told him why you didn't want us climbing– about how that she-cat you loved died."

"What? Who told you that I loved her?" His eyes narrowed and he looked pointedly at Honeydew who shook her head and glared at him.

"That's not the point! The point is that I tried to tell him not to and we have to find him!"

Once Honeydew processed everything, she nodded. "So he is out of camp. But you said you knew where he was? Or were you just saying you knew he was out of camp?"

"Well... I had a strange dream that felt real. Like really real. Duskkit and I were on a tree-"

"Get to the point. Where is he?" Jaybounce cut in, ear flicking impatiently.

"Let her speak Jaybounce." Honeydew warned before nodding

encouragingly to Twilightkit.

Twililghtkit shuffled her paws and took a deep breath. "...We were on a tree really high up. We could see the moon and we were warriors. Duskkit's name was Duskbreeze and something was bothering him. I tried to get him to tell me but he turned to me like he saw the most horrid thing ever! His eyes were huge and he begged me to help him before he backed up and fell off the tree, screaming. Then I heard what I think were foxes and then he cried in pain and I woke up."

"Sounds made up." Jaybounce immediately said, dismissing it. "Just a nightmare. Nothing more."

"Now hold on." Honeydew looked at Twilightkit, eyes round with worry, "Think back. Was there a tree taller than that one around?"

Twilightkit shook her head and Honeydew turned to Jaybounce, "Search the Squirrel Oak. He might be there."

"Next you're going to ask me to search all the fox dens around the territory." He grumbled before padding off into the clearing.

"I'm sorry for how he's acting. He just must've slept on a thistle or got up on the wrong side of his nest." Honeydew mumbled softly, licking Twilightkit's ear.

She hesitated before asking, "He loves us right? Like, loves us as much as you?"

Honeydew went silent for a few heartbeats, trying to think of what to say. "Of course he loves you. He just... doesn't know how to show it." Her mother glanced at the tree branches above. "I know it doesn't seem like he does. The she-cat I told you about, the one who died, he loved greatly and had many fantasies about kits with her. He's just still grieving her."

"Honeydew? He loves you too. Right? As much as her? Everything he told you was just because he's worried about Duskkit. Right?" Twilightkit's eyes were hopeful.

Honeydew paused, eyes wide and she mumbled, "So you heard

more than what you said..." she perked her ears, scanning the clearing and spotting her other kits playing with each other by the Training Branches. "Oh, would you look at that, Daykit and Dawnkit need me. How about you go-" she looked at Twilightkit's paw, "-to Tatteredleaf so she can check on your paw."

Twilightkit stared after her mother as she went over to Daykit and Dawnkit before glancing at the medicine hollow. *Twice now the both of them have sent me to Tatteredleaf. They know I want to be a warrior, right?* Twilightkit shook her head and turned towards the medicine hollow, starting to head over.

Her thoughts whirled over what had happened this morning. But what really bothered her was what she heard between Jaybounce and Honeydew. And how little Jaybounce seemed to care that Duskkit was missing. Maybe she could ask Tatteredleaf about it.

This time, Twilightkit sat patiently by the nests, fidgeting with some loose moss. After what felt like moons of waiting, finally Tatteredleaf leaped down from the top of the tree where her nest was.

"Oh! Hi Twilightkit, how's your paw feeling?" Tatteredleaf asked, a few leaves and petals loose in her pelt.

"It still hurts a little. But not much. Or at least not noticeable really." She responded, sticking out her paw for the medicine cat to investigate.

"It looks great! It should be fine to use. Just try not to climb. Alright?"

"Okay!" Twilightkit tested it, pressing it to the ground and let out a satisfied purr when it didn't hurt.

"You're good to go unless anything else is bothering you." Tatteredleaf smiled at Twilightkit, tail curled.

"Well... It's not a wound but it *is* something that's bothering me and I feel like I should tell someone." Twilightkit shuffled her paws slightly, staring at the tree hollow behind Tatteredleaf where the

herbs were stored.

"Okay. What's on your mind?" Tatteredleaf asked, sitting down next to Twilightkit and wrapping her tail around her.

"Well. Yesterday, Duskkit said that he wanted to prove Jaybounce wrong about something and so he said that he'd sneak out of camp at night and do it. I told him it was a bad idea and then later told him that Jaybounce was going to give him another chance. And he said that he wouldn't do it. I ended up having a really real feeling dream where he fell off a tree and was eaten by foxes and when I woke up, he wasn't there. Then I told Honeydew and she went to tell Jaybounce but they ended up arguing and..." she trailed off, taking a breath, "and he said that he only wanted kits with Honeydew to ease the grief. He said he doesn't care about us. Not like Honeydew does."

Tatteredleaf seemed to be lost in thought before nodding slowly. "Well, the dream might have been your gut telling you that he was going to do it and of course Jaybounce doesn't love you as much as Honeydew."

Twilightkit's eyes widened, hurt from what Tatteredleaf said.

"No tom loves their kits as much as their mother does. She-cats are supposed to love their kits and care for them. Jaybounce *does* love you, just not as much as Honeydew does. A she-cat is supposed to protect her kit from everything— that's part of a mother's love."

Twilightkit slightly nodded, "Thanks Tatteredleaf."

"Of course. Now go hang out with your littermates." She nudged Twilightkit away slightly with her nose towards the Training Branches. "Just be careful with your paw!" Twilightkit heard as she walked-hopped towards where her littermates were.

"Twilightkit! There you are!" she heard Dawnkit squeak.

"Yeah, hi I'm here." Twilightkit said, tail lifting slightly before she turned to look at Honeydew who was playing with Daykit on the branches.

Clearly, she was still anxious about Duskkit. Her mind drifted back to the dream. Why did it feel so real and why did she have a feeling there was no point in looking?

"Twilightkit stop daydreaming! Wake up! Wake up! Wake up!" Twilightkit was pushed to the ground as Dawnkit prodded and pushed her.

"Sorry!" She scrambled to her paws, pushing off Dawnkit, and she licked her ruffled fur. "I was thinking about Duskkit."

"Oh he's gonna be fine! Honeydew said Jaybounce was going to find him and we'll all be back together again." He said cheerfully, tail in the air.

Twilightkit went silent. She didn't believe that– no matter how much she wanted to. "Yeah... You're right. I'm sure he'll be *great*." She flashed her brother a reassuring smile before turning to the branches.

Why did her mother try to get their hopes up? Surely she knew that something terrible happened! Just looking at her I can tell she doesn't believe what she said. Duskkit, I'm so sorry. Twilightkit thought, looking up at the sky. Lot's of white puffy clouds covered the bright blue sky. Was he up there, watching them? Or could StarClan not see unless Silverpelt was showing?

"Ugh. Twilightkit! You're daydreaming again! Come on. Let's play or do *something* other than stare at invisible birds." Dawnkit shoved her again, padding over to the branches where he'd scrape his claws across the bark before turning to Twilightkit, beckoning her over with a tail flick.

She shook her head, trying to clear the thoughts. "Okay. Coming." She said, padding over. "What do you want to do then?"

"Good question! What about we play-"

"Moss ball!" Daykit squealed, padding over to them. Twilightkit didn't even notice Daykit climbing down.

"But moss ball is boring." Dawnkit whined. "Let's play something

else."

Daykit drooped her head in disappointment but straightened herself up. "Okay. Fine then. What do you want to play?"

"Let's play hunter and prey!"

"But we *always* play that!"

"Well it's fun!"

"Yeah cause you always win!"

"Not true!"

"It is. Whether you play hunter *or* prey."

"Well you're just jealous I know all the good spots and that I know you always hide in the same spots."

"No I'm not!"

"Kits! Enough!" Honeydew hissed sharply and both Daykit and Dawnkit immediately fell silent.

Honeydew never snapped like that– even when they were all bickering. "How about all of you just go play moss ball in the nursery or something, okay?" Her tone softened but there was still annoyance in it.

The three of them exchanged small glances before nodding. "Okay Honeydew." Daykit mumbled before quietly padding to the nursery. Each of them were still a little surprised at their mother's tone of voice.

She's just stressed about Duskkit. I am too. Twilightkit thought, trying to reassure herself.

The three sat down in the nursery and Twilightkit glanced outside into the clearing where she saw Honeydew picking something off the pile and sitting down underneath a branch. She pawed at it slightly before letting out a breath and resting her muzzle on her

paws. Twilightkit couldn't help but feel bad. Honeydew had to rely on Jaybounce to find Duskkit and couldn't go out searching herself.

Dawnkit and Daykit were finding moss from an unused nest and rolling it into a ball quietly, making sure to not disturb Sunnyhorizon who was grooming her two kits.

Twilightkit wasn't sure what she wanted to do. She didn't really feel like playing and she certainly wasn't sleepy. Sighing, she walked back to the den entrance and sat down, staring at the entrance where warriors climbed up and down.

She hoped Jaybounce could find Duskkit alive or at least just find him. Twilightkit tried to convince herself over and over that he wasn't dead. That he was perfectly fine and he was just sleeping in a hollow. She tried to convince herself that everything was going to be okay and that Jaybounce would return with the brother she grew up with. With the cat she trusted more than anyone.

Her mind started to spiral and she started to blame herself for everything. *Maybe if I had come with him, we'd make it out together and we'd still be with each other now– facing whatever punishment Flyingstar would give us. Facing the clan together.*

When she heard an angry snarl, Twilightkit came back to reality. Honeydew's fur was spiked and her muzzle was barely a whisker's length from Jaybounce's.
"What do you mean you *couldn't* find him? You should still be out there, looking for him! He could be out there still, scared, hungry, frightened, alone. With no cat there to save him from any trouble. Don't you care about him?"

Jaybounce was speechless for a few seconds. He was about to speak but was interrupted before a sound could even leave his mouth.

"No. I don't want to hear a word from you. You're a heartless tom with no care in the world for his kits. Just because you lost Juniperspring doesn't mean you can use your kits and I as an outlet or a tool to get over it. I'm sick of your dung Jaybounce. Even the kits can clearly tell that something is wrong with you! You barely talk to them, I have to tell you to spend time with them, and you

punish my kits for making mistakes because you're 'scared' they'll kill themselves on the Training Branches– which in case you forgot, was made to train kits so they don't kill themselves in the trees. I made a mistake of having kits with you. You're the reason that Duskkit is missing. The reason he could have been mauled by foxes." She spat, tail lashing and claws scraping into the bark beneath her paws. In a lower, cold tone, she'd growl, "I don't want you near my kits ever again. If I see you even exchange a word with them, I will claw your pelt off. *We're done.*" With that, she whisked away, back under the branch where the prey she picked up earlier was still sitting there, untouched.

Jaybounce's eyes were wide. Whether it was with shock, grief, or hurt, Twilightkit could tell he didn't expect that. Looking around the clearing, she could tell no cat did. There was murmuring and cats were staring right at Jaybounce. He seemed humiliated. Twilightkit's fur prickled a little bit. All those cats staring at him and very clearly talking about him? That must feel horrible!

Twilghtkit glanced at her littermates who's eyes were filled with confusion and fear. It'd just be the three of them and Honeydew if they couldn't find Duskkit. They'd have to stay strong together

* * *

Twilightkit laid wide awake in the nest, nestled up against Honeydew and both her littermates. Was Honeydew right about what she said earlier? What if Duskkit really was out there starving, scared, and alone? Guilt wormed under her pelt again. *What if it were me instead? What would Duskkit do?* She knew the answer. He'd sneak out to go find her. Twilightkit couldn't leave him out there alone.

What if he was stuck in a burrow somewhere? What if he was injured? What if that dream wasn't him dying but him falling somewhere like a fox den and getting trapped?

Unable to handle the guilt and paranoia, she carefully slipped out from her mother's belly without waking anyone up. Peaking her head out of the nursery, her heart fluttered with anxiety but excitement too. Twilightkit was determined to find her brother.

The clearing was casted in shadows with little beams of moonlight filtering through. It was so quiet and peaceful. Every cat was asleep and she could hear the soft snores of the elders, the murmurs of dreaming apprentices, and the movement of twitching warriors. She looked up at the sky and she got a glimpse of Silverpelt. The camp felt like a whole different place in the moonlight.

She quietly padded into the clearing and hesitated before deciding if climbing or walking was a better route. *Climbing, I could have the risk of falling. Walking, I could have the risk of running into a predator.* After thinking for a few heartbeats, she decided that climbing would be a safer route. Even with her slightly injured paw, she trusted her ability to climb well enough and she could always take her time.

Taking a deep breath, Twilightkit padded to the edge of the clearing where warriors usually entered and exited. Peering down, she saw two warriors standing guard at the base of the tree, ears perked.

She backed up before slowly walking forwards on a branch that intertwined with another branch from another tree. She dug her claws in the branch as she inched along. After a while, she finally made it to the other tree.

If I actually want to try to get to him, I have to be quicker. She told herself before picking up her pace slightly. She got to the edge of another branch and tried her best not to look down. It'd mess her up and she'd plummet to her most certain death. Taking a deep breath, she backed up a little before bounding forward and leaping towards the branch that was in front of her. Her claws were outstretched, ready to grip onto the branch. Twilightkit's heart dropped when her front claws barely hooked into the wood, causing her to dangle in the air. Panicked, she tried her best to haul herself up and she was clinging onto the branch with all four paws hooked around it.

After calming down slightly, she climbed farther on the branch to a thicker part where she could stand. Once she was able to stand, Twilightkit laid down and took a breather. That was close– too close. Hesitating, she wasn't sure if she should keep going on. *Of course I should keep going. Duskkit depends on it!*

Determined again, she went to the edge of the next branch and this time cleared the jump. Now feeling better, she began to go from branch to branch in different directions until a realization hit her while she was jumping. She had no idea where Duskkit would be and where she was. How was she meant to get back?

Forgetting to see where she was placing her paws, she missed a branch and fell into a bush, letting out a startled yelp. Thankfully, the bush cushioned her fall. However, Twilightkit still felt stinging cuts. Groaning, she slid out of the bush. Testing each of her paws, she was relieved when they were fine. Especially the one that she had wretched her claw.

Twilightkit shook her pelt, letting loose leaves fall around her. Her fur was all messy and she sighed. Honeydew would kill her if her fur looked like this. *She'll kill me once she finds out where I am.* Twilightkit tried not to let that thought dwell for long. She'd be fine. She could handle the punishments *if* she was found.

With shaky paws, twilightkit walked around, fur spiking at every sound. Everything smelled weird and was huge. She let out a small whimper when an owl screeched. All the sounds she heard from the nursery didn't seem scary but now they sure did. *Was this how Duskkit felt? No. Feels.* She had to believe he was still alive. Should she try calling out his name?

"Duskkit? Are you out here?" She called, waiting for a response. *Silence*. "Duskkit! Where are you?" Her ears were perked, straining for any reply.

Twilightkit felt defeated and she sat down where she was, head lowered and ears flattened, praying a fox wouldn't come and snap her in half.

"*Twilightkit? Are you there?"*

Twilightkit shot up, looking around. Was she hearing things? Was that the faint voice of Duskkit?

"Duskkit! Where are you? It is! It is me!" She called, her voice shaking with relief and excitement.

"*A tree swallowed me!*"

Twilightkit blinked, confused. "A tree? How did a tree swallow you?" She asked, walking around, trying to listen to which tree his voice was coming from.

"I uh... fell and I heard a yap nearby so I climbed into the nearest tree hollow I saw and it swallowed me!" Duskkit exclaimed.

"Keep talking! I'll find you!" She said, looking around.

"Okay..." he stopped to think for a few heartbeats. "Thanks for coming to find me. Multiple patrols came by but they were talking so they didn't hear me. I should've listened to you. I shouldn't have left camp. But I just wanted to see it all and well– It's scary out here. I don't know how far from camp we are. What are the chances of you even coming by here? How are Daykit and Dawnkit? Are they doing alright? What about Jaybounce and. . ."

As Duskkit blabbered on and on, she eventually found him. Standing on her hind quarters, she put her ear to the trunk and sure enough, she heard him. "Found you!"

Duskkit fell silent before she heard an excited squeal.

"Let me try to figure out how to get you out of there..." She circled the trunk and looking up, she spotted the hollow he was talking about. It wasn't super high up but high enough to hurt if she were to fall in. "You're not hurt, are you?"

"*Good question. Everything feels sore from the position I'm in. I guess we'll find out.*" He said, scraping a claw on the bark from the inside.

"Okay. I'll try to do something... Maybe I can move a rock or a-" she cut herself off as she heard a low growl somewhere near her. Eyes wide, she fluffed out her tail and let out a terrified yelp and scampered up into the hollow, falling inside.

Chapter Three

[image]

Just want to say before you start reading this chapter, there is some violence towards the end! Also, if you want to be told about new releases, I have a Discord Server that I made for fun. Go check it out if you want: https://discord.gg/DXhu9GrVvZ

Twilight awoke from a loud owl screech. It was still dark and she had no idea how close it was to dawn. She had managed to move enough to where both her and Duskkit were in a more comfortable position but it wasn't much better. She shifted a little bit and let out a sad sigh.

"Twilightkit? Are you awake?" she was caught off guard when she heard Duskkit's small *hoarse* voice.

"Yeah. I'm awake."

"Do you think we'll be able to get out of here before we starve to death?" His voice sounded scratchy but she wasn't sure if it already was and she didn't notice from her panic.

There was a brief moment of silence. "Yeah. We... we just gotta be smart about it."

Duskkit hesitated before speaking, "Do you mean that or are you just trying to make me feel better?"

"Of course I mean it! We can't give up cause we *will* starve. I think that the fox is gone. You can climb out if you want, stretch your legs and get help somehow."

"No. You should do it- I've already been here, I can handle a bit longer. Plus you're already on top of me basically. It'll be easier for you to climb out."

"But-"

"Either you do it or we can wait here till dawn which honestly, I think is a much better idea."

Twilightkit rolled her eyes. She wasn't going to wait till dawn. "*Or* we get out of here now and figure out how to get back to camp."
"And get lost then eaten by foxes?"

"Well- we'll just be careful."

Duskkit sighed. "You're going to get yourself killed. *But* if you're going to do it anyways, I want to at least be there with you so I can protect you or something."

"Aha! You admit it." She puffed her chest out in pride, tail curled before she stood up, trying her best not to hurt Duskkit.

"Pssch. No I don't, I just want to stretch- Ow! You can at least be more careful." He pouted with a series of coughing following after.

Twilightkit murmured a quick apology before crawling to the opening and stretching as far up as she could, barely managing to get her paws on the rim of the hole she had slipped into. She lifted her head as high as she could, just barely getting her eyes far up enough to be able to see the outside. But she glanced back down at Duskkit, realizing that he probably hasn't drinken anything either. Food was the least of their concern- she had to get him out so he wouldn't die of dehydration!
"Okay. I'm going to try to jump or I guess climb out. Just a heads up so you won't be surprised if I fall on top of you again."

Duskkit scratched at the bark in front of him, after agreeing, "Got it."

Twilightkit braced herself as she pulled herself up with her front paws and dug her back claws into the bark and hauled herself up. The small triumph she felt was brief because she leaned a little *too* forward and fell face-first into the dirt and let out an *oof* as dirt coated her face.

Scrambling to her paws, she'd glance around, letting her eyes

adjust. Her ears were perked as she listened for the snarling of the fox or anything else that'd want to eat her but there was nothing. All she heard was crickets and owl hoots.

Twilightkit started to look for something to help her littermate out of the tree hollow after feeling like she was safe enough and began to poke around. She found some sticks but they were too thin and weak and a larger stick but it was too heavy and pointy.

Eventually, she managed to find a thick vine hanging really close to the ground. It took a few attempts for her to manage to get it down but she did and dragged it back to the hollow.

"Duskkit? Are you still there- *alive*?"

"Yeah. You finally found something?"

"Yep! It's a vine I think but it seems pretty strong. I was thinking maybe you could grab onto it and I can pull you out somehow?"

"Uhhh. I don't know if that'll work but yeah, sure!"

Without hesitation, Twilightkit tried her best to lift the vine and shove it into the hollow but it didn't work since it fell entirely into the hollow.

"Hang on a little longer, I need to figure out where to find something that I can stuff in there so you can climb out."

"Can't you just push a light rock or something?" He suggested.

Twilightkit looked around, frowning. "No. They're all too big. Maybe I can try to somehow drag a stick and you can grab onto it?"

"If you're strong enough, that'd work I think."
"Okay. Hang on I need to go find a stick big enough to drag you out but not too heavy." Without waiting for Duskkit's response, she wiggled through a bush and scanned the clearing she came out into. There were lot's of flowers and when she listened closely, she could hear a creek.

Wandering towards the sound, Twilightkit squeezed through

another bush and instantly spotted the creek. The water was illuminated by the moonlight and it was memorizing. She stalked closer and at the edge of the water, peered down and saw her reflection.

Staring at it, she felt like something was off.Twilightkit squinted and she quickly stuck her paw in the water, waving it away. She looked behind her only to frown. When she looked back into the water, it was gone. There was a silhouette of a figure behind her in the reflection originally but now, she saw no sign of it.

Shaking out her pelt, she backed away from the water and looked around for a stick but ultimately, found nothing. Sighing, she'd start to walk back to where she left Duskkit.

When she got back, she spotted a stick wedged between two rocks. It was the perfect size too! Tail lifted, Twilightkit bounded over, her small legs scattering leaves around.

Grabbing the stick with her little mouth, she tried her best to pull it out but failed. Letting out a small snort, she backed up and studied it. If she were to un-wedge it a bit, it might be easier to pull out.

Twilightkit huffed as she climbed up the rocks and squeezed underneath the branch, letting out a small hiss when the bark scraped her skin, causing it to sting. Ignoring the pain as best as she could, she used practically the rest of her energy heaving the stick up.

She jumped down and caught her breath, looking back at the stick. Bracing herself, she grabbed on and pulled as hard as she could, which wasn't that hard– but it was enough.
The stick came out suddenly, causing the unexpecting Twilightkit to fall backwards, the stick scraping her pelt more. Startled, her fur spiked and she scampered back quickly, eyes wide as she stared at the stick. *First a tree swallows Duskkit and now a stick tries to lunge at me.* She thought to herself as she slowed her breathing and calmed down a bit.

Once she felt she stared it down long enough, she clamped her jaw on the skinny end and pulled it to the hollow where Duskkit was.

"Duskkit? You still there?" She asked, perking her ears to see if he was asleep or not.

In a hoarse voice, he murmured his response but she couldn't hear it.

"Okay, well, I'm going to try to shove this stick in there. I need you to grab onto it- okay?"

"*Okay.*" Was all she heard. Worry nagged her but she shoved it to the back of her mind. He was fine.

Staring at the stick, she decided to try to prop it up against the tree and then grab the thicker part which was on the grass and shove it up at an angle so it'd go in. Deciding to do that, she felt it get a lot heavier and felt the strain on her muscles as she tried to pull it back out. Letting out a small squeak, she let go and the stick slid out of her paws and out of the hollow.

Duskkit's small paws were on the base of the hollow and she could hear his hind legs scrabbling inside to get a hold. Twilightkit raced over and encouraged him and eventually he managed to get out– falling flat on his stomach like Twilightkit did.

He looked thin and exhausted and she let him lean against her.

"You alright? You look so frail..." she murmured, sniffing him.

He wheezed and nodded, "I'm just really thirsty."

"There's a creek really close. Come on"

She led the way to the water and when they got to it, he wobbled over and laid down in front of the water, lapping at it eagerly. Twilightkit glanced at the water but her mind flashed back to the silhouette that was behind her. After a small shudder, she decided not to go near the water.

It felt like forever before Duskkit finally backed away, his muzzle soaked, dripping water. He gave a grateful smile to Twilightkit while he stretched out his legs.

"Thank you Twilightkit. I thought I was going to die in there and nobody would find me till I was just a pile of bones!" He exclaimed as he padded over, nuzzling her cheek.

"I could never leave you! The warriors were about to give up yesterday and I doubt they'd even check if it weren't for Honeydew's constant nagging." There was silence and she could see the hurt in Duskkit eyes so she quickly added, "They just were quick to assume you were eaten by foxes because they found fox scent and a tuft of your fur."

Relief softened his face and he rested his head on her shoulder. The two of them soaked up each other's affection before finally she backed up.

"We should find our way back to camp. We're just sitting ducks right here– waiting for that fox to come back and snatch us."

He murmured in agreement and the two padded side-by-side, looking up at the large trees for any sign of the camp. It felt awkward walking in silence but she didn't know what to say. Plus, they had to listen so a fox couldn't ambush them.

After ages of walking, Duskkit finally spoke, "I.. I think we're lost. I mean we were already but I don't even know if we're still in CanopyClan territory."

"Well... maybe it's best to find somewhere hidden to sleep. It'll be easier to see in the light and there'll be patrols around to look for us." She suggested, feeling like her paws were going to fall off.

The pair climbed into some bushes and huddled close to each other for protection. Even though she felt exhausted, sleep refused to come and so she'd lay there, wide awake, listening to her littermate's soft snores.

Eventually, Twilightkit got to her paws slowly, not wanting to wake up Duskkit. She crawled out of the bush and looked around with her fur spiked. It was still dark out and with the trees, she had no idea how close dawn was. Sleep felt so far off but Twilightkit decided that she'd try again. It wouldn't help them if she was

slacking because she didn't want to sleep.

She sighed and crawled back into the bush, curling up next to Duskkit and closing her eyes, waiting for sleep to come.

* * *

The sounds of murmuring and the small rays of sunlight in her eyes stirred Twilightkit. Her eyes slowly drifted open and she looked next to her where Duskkit was still sleeping peacefully. She perked her ears, trying to see if she could recognize the voices. But she couldn't and after a few heartbeats, she decided to reveal herself. Whether they were CanopyClan cats or not, they had to be found.

She began to shout, looking around for the cats she heard. The area they were in was still a forest but it seemed sort of foggy and there was a gross stench. Large white trees were up ahead and she could see puddles. Also, the dirt she was standing on felt muddy and it made a squelch sound when she placed her paw in it. Were they by SwampClan territory?

Her thoughts were interrupted with the sound of voices heading towards her and the sound of splashing along with pawsteps. Twilightkit's heart began to pound and she wondered whether or not she made a mistake. Would these cats try to kill her or take her back to their camp instead?

"Are you sure it was this way, Foggysky?" She heard a voice call. She definitely didn't know a Foggysky in CanopyClan...

"Pretty sure. Let me check for scents." A voice responded and there was silence before the tom spoke up again, "Yeah it was this way. It smells like CanopyClan. Follow me!"

Twilightkit stayed where she was, unsure whether she should shout or not. Before she could decide, bushes in front of her began to rustle and the talking was much louder. She backed up against a tree and puffed out her fur.

"The strong is much stronger over here and-" the tom caught himself off, studying her closely. He had a white pelt with a darker silver-

like color with stripes on his back. His eyes were green and his paws were dark like his back. "I found the source- it's a small she-kit." He called behind him before looking back at her curiously with soft eyes. "You can relax, we're not here to hurt you."

She stayed silent as three more cats appeared from the bushes. An older more experienced looking cat who seemed to hold a sense of authority padded forward. He was also white but with dark and light striped patches throughout his body along with harsh blue-green eyes that sent ripples down her spine.

After him, a young molly who she assumed was an apprentice bounded out, seeming excited. She was white as well but had a playful expression with dark green eyes along with ginger flecks scattered around.

And lastly, a dark gray molly padded out who had a brown striped body and kind blue eyes.

Twilightkit already decided she didn't like the second cat. He seemed rude and careless. As she was about to speak, but the bush where Duskkit was sleeping rustled and he caught the patrol off-guard as he scrambled underneath their paws and stood defensively in front of Twilightkit.

The SwampClan cats seemed to be unsure as to what to say until the oldest and *meanest* looking one spoke up, "What are you kits doing out of your camp and how many more of you are around?"

Duskkit puffed out his chest and stood tall. "It's just us two and I got lost so she went to go find me and now we're both lost."

The cat frowned and glanced at the rest of the patrol before turning back to the kits. "Well that was mouse-brained of the both of you. How old are you? Two moons? You'd think CanopyClan would take better care of their kits." He rolled his eyes and sighed.

Twilightkit's puffed tail swished as he commented on her clan and she felt the need to defend them. "CanopyClan does take good care of their kits! We just... weren't being smart is all."

"Yeah, sure. Whatever you say." He scoffed before adding, "Maybe we should just leave you here to find your own way back. I can tell you one thing, your camp certainly isn't this way."

"Cloudysun– they're just kits. You know as well as I do that even the kits back at camp are curious and like to wander off. We can at least keep them safe until a CanopyClan patrol comes by." The first tom said and she assumed he was Foggysky. He gave the kits a small and comforting grin and she already liked him.

The younger she-cat stepped up and nodded, tail curled. "The way back to camp would take too long and plus, I'm sure Adderstar *and* Flyingstar wouldn't be too pleased that we took these two back to camp."

The second cat, Cloudysun, gave a reluctant nod. "I suppose you're right, Whitepaw. And since you'd rather stay with them Foggysky-" He turned to face the tom, "-then go ahead. I'm sure Oakshadow and Whitepaw would happily go patrol the rest of the border."

Whitepaw padded over to Foggysky's side and met Cloudysun's eyes. "Actually, I rather hang out with these kits."

Oakshadow padded over and sat down next to Foggysky– quite close. Close enough to where their pelts were touching. "I won't feel safe leaving the kits here. Even with two other warriors, I'll feel better knowing I'm here as well to protect them."

A small growl escaped Cloudysun's throat and his eyes narrowed. "Very well then. *I'll* finish up the patrol and report your find to Adderstar." With that, Cloudysun turned and padded through some bushes, tail flicking.

Twilightkit looked at the remaining cats wearily and sat down, still against the tree. Duskkit backed up and sat down next to her as well and the cats sat in silence.

Whitepaw was watching them curiously while Foggysky and Oakshadow settled down next to each other.

Foggysky finally spoke up after getting into a comfortable position.

"So, what are your names?"

"I'm Twilightkit and this is my brother Duskkit." She said with a little hesitance.

Whitepaw moved closer to Duskkit and hers along with all the other cats' eyes on her, she suddenly felt self-conscious and made herself smaller.

"How long have you guys been out here? Duskkit seems skinny." Whitepaw observed before turning to Foggysky, eyes bright and hopeful. "Can I go hunt for them? I'm sure they're starving!"

Duskkit spoke up, inching away from Whitepaw and closer to Twilightkit. "Not long. I've been out here for... three days? Twilightkit has been out here for a night."

Foggysky frowned and glanced up at the trees. "That's quite a long time to be out here alone. Has any cat come to look for you?"

"For Duskkit yeah. I only went to find Duskkit last night because our father, Jaybounce, claimed he looked everywhere and that Duskkit was fox food by now."

"Can I?" Whitepaw asked again, sitting up.

"No. Once their clanmates find them, they'll be fed." Foggysky said sternly.

Whitepaw sighed and glanced at the kits before laying down again. "We're going to be here all day! It's just barely dawn. Can I just go find a patrol and tell them?"

Foggysky let out an annoyed sigh. "Just be patient. It *is* dawn so a patrol should be here soon. If you're really *that* restless, how about you go hunt, hm?" he'd suggest and Whitepaw nodded, disappearing into the bushes.

Duskkit looked at Twilightkit and offered a small smile and she returned it. He cuffed her ears and before she knew it, they were having a little scuffle. She heard Foggysky's and Oakshadow's soft *mrrows* of laughter but she didn't care. She was having fun with

Duskkit.

She leaped forward and managed to pin Duskkit down but he kicked up and sent her back. She rolled to her paws and lunged again, grabbing his scruff and when he went to shake her off, he came toppling down with her. They tumbled and lashed out at each other, letting out small squeals as they played.

Finally, they slowed down, panting as they grinned at each other. She couldn't imagine life without Duskkit. Twilightkit had her other siblings but she definitely felt closest with Duskkit. They laid down together, still purring.

Foggysky tensed and he stood up, ears perked. "There's a patrol heading our way."

Duskkit and Twilightkit both went quiet and got to their paws, dashing behind Oakshadow as she beckoned them over.

Foggysky told them to halt and then padded through some bushes. She heard an alerted meow and then talking, and then the bush rustled again and Jaybounce, Owlwhisker, and Muddypaw all appeared behind Foggysky.

"Jaybounce!" Twilightkit squealed, dashing over. She looked up at him and met his eyes. Her ears slightly lowered though as her hopeful and excited eyes were met with disappointment and annoyance. She pushed away her feelings of unease. He surely was just mad at them for sneaking off.

"Thank you Foggysky for finding them and keeping the safe." Was all Jaybounce said before beckoning Duskkit and Twilightkit to follow. She turned to look at Duskkit who seemed reluctant to follow and she frowned. He wanted to go home, right?

Foggysky simply dipped his head and he disappeared onto his side of the border with Oakshadow at his paws.

Once the patrol got deeper into CanopyClan territory, Jaybounce had them halt and he turned to Twilightkit and Duskkit, eyes narrowed and tail lashing. "I hope you have a good reason for

sneaking out and wasting my time." He snapped, voice hard and cold.

Twilightkit shrunk back and her ears flattened. She wasn't sure what to say and tears were threatening to fall. But Duskkit's fur was bristling instead and he stood tall, facing Jaybounce, tail lashing.

"So I could prove to you that I'm not weak and that I don't need your approval." Duskkit retorted

Jaybounce's eyes flashed with anger and it looked like he was about to lash out but he took a deep breath and turned to Owlwhisker and Muddypaw. "You two go back to camp. I need to talk with these two."

Muddypaw's gaze flashed with empathy and he bounded after Owlwhisker towards camp.

Jaybounce waited for the cats to disappear before turning back to Duskkit and shoving his muzzle barely a whisker-length away from Duskkit's but amazingly, Duskkit didn't flinch.

"Listen here *kit*. I don't care whether you were trying to prove yourself or not. What happens if you were killed, hm? Then all you would've done is prove to StarClan that you're a mouse brain and didn't deserve to live a warrior's life." He spat and Duskkit backed away. Jaybounce let out a small snort before his eyes landed on Twilightkit. "And you..." he snarled, taking a step towards her. "Do you know what panic you caused your mother? You were even more mouse brained to go look for him! And look at you- the both of you- you're covered in scratches and scrapes."

Twilightkit's fear turned into anger. "Why do you care what Honeydew feels? It's not like you love her anyways! You- you never wanted us in the first place! Why do you care?" She spat back and he visibly flinched. "You wanted kits with Juniperspring instead. You said it yourself." Her voice quivered and she tried her best to hold back tears.

Jaybounce's eyes were now slitted more and he snarled. "How about *you* stop worrying about *me* and my life, hm? I like that idea better.

Stop trying to act like your mother, you little annoying piece of dung. And you know what? Fine. I never did want you but you already know that because you're too miserable to care about yourself and rather stick your muzzle in places it doesn't belong." He batted her muzzle and Duskkit raced in front of her.

"Leave her alone!" He said, his voice squeaky.

"Stay out of this Duskkit." Jaybounce warned, shoving him to the side. He was about to say something else to her but he was cut off by an angry growl from the bracken and everyone got silent, staring at the direction it came from.

"Duskkit, get back behind me." He'd say in a cautious tone, not taking his eyes off of a bush.

"Why should I listen to you?" He spat, his back facing the direction of growling.

She heard the soft crunch of leaves and the silence. Then a bush rustled. Then silence.

"*Duskkit*." Jaybounce said again through clenched teeth, getting in a defensive crouch.

"I'm not going to listen to you!" he practically shouted, tail puffing up.

"DUSKKIT GET OVERHERE BEFORE YOU DIE!" Jaybounce shouted but it was too late.

Another growl escaped the bush and a flash of bright orange rushed forward.

It felt like everything was in slow motion as her eyes widened. It was going straight for Duskkit.

She turned to look at Jaybounce but he just stood there and watched as it rushed towards Duskkit.

"Duskkit!" She squealed. If Jaybounce wasn't going to do anything, she would. She rushed forward only to be lifted into the air.

Twilightkit wriggled and yelped and yowled, desperate to get free but it was no use.

She stopped fighting and watched as her littermate ran towards them only to be stopped by the snatching jaws of a fox. He was thrown into the air and his bloodcurdling yowl split the air, blood spraying everywhere as the fox bit down again. He the fox dropped him and his eyes were full of pain and anguish but then they turned dull. His body stopped moving and blood pooled around him, the red crimson liquid staining the grass. And then a realization hit her. *Jaybounce* watched him die and did nothing.

The fox growled and took a few steps toward Jaybounce who backed up and ran off, in a direction. She didn't pay attention. The scene replayed over and over and tears welled up. Twilightkit didn't hold back this time and they poured out.

She was numb after crying. She hardly was aware of them climbing up into camp or Honeydew grabbing her from Jaybounce and dropping her into the nursery. She didn't notice her littermates pounding her with questions nor Honeydew yowling her head off to Jaybounce. Nothing felt real anymore. Jaybounce *watched* Duskkit. He knew what was coming. But he didn't try to stop it. He let it happen.

Her breath wavered and she could feel herself shaking. Why didn't he let her help out Duskkit? She knew he didn't care but... her thoughts trailed off and when she came back to her senses, she was at her mother's side and she leaned into the rhythmic strokes.

She could hear Dawnkit's small voice whisper, "Honeydew, what's wrong with her? Why is she acting like that?"

"Shhh Dawnkit. She'll be alright. She just saw something scary. Give her some time." Honeydew's voice was soft but Twilightkit could hear the grief in it.

Twilightkit's thoughts came pouring back and now her shock and fear was replaced with betrayal and rage.

Jaybounce left him to die.

He knew exactly what was coming.

He didn't care.

Chapter Four

It felt like only a night had passed since Duskkit died but apparently, a night had blended with almost two moons of her being numb. Her littermates stopped playing with her and the only times she ever moved was to eat or sip water. Plus there were new kits around her age in the nursery too. Apparently a rogue molly brought her kits here and joined the clan. But Twilightkit had stayed in the nursery, just staring at nothing, while her mother tried to get her out of her trance. No matter how much she slept, stared, and thought, the memory never vanished. It felt as fresh as when she did watch *him* get mauled. And her hate for her father was just growing more and more. She tried to think of any reason why he just sat and watched but none of them made her feel good nor felt right.

"Twilightkit?" She heard Honeydew's soft and gentle voice whisper and she didn't go on till Twilightkit met her eyes. "Tatteredleaf wants to talk to you for a little bit."

She stared at her mother for a few heartbeats with a blank stare, her words not registering. At least not till she heard her mother sigh and she was lifted into the air and brought to the medicine den.

Twilightkit was about to pad after Honeydew back but was stopped by a paw blocking her way. She frowned and looked up to see Tatteredleaf hovering above her.

"Come back this way, Twilightkit. We can talk where you won't have to worry about being overheard by your clanmates and denmates." Tatteredleaf said in a soothing voice, walking Twilightkit to a nest behind a branch covered in leaves.

She sat down and curled her tail around her paws, studying everything around her and not looking up at Tatteredleaf.

There were a few moments of silence before Tatteredleaf finally spoke, seeming to choose her words carefully. "I know it's hard...

Really hard without Duskkit. And that will never change. But sometimes, we need to look past the past, so we're not trapped in an endless circle of grief, anger, and a whole lot more. It's not fair that he was taken so quickly and so early but even he wouldn't want to see you so hopeless and, unlike you. It's hard enough for your mother to lose Duskkit as well but to see you in this state? It has to be even harder. And Jaybounce-"

"I don't care about Jaybounce!" Twilightkit spat, feeling her tears threaten to fall. "He let Duskkit die!"

Tatteredleaf studied Twilightkit for a few heartbeats before laying down and inviting her to lay next to her. Reluctantly, Twilightkit did.

"Don't blame your father. He just... he just wanted to make sure you were alright. Do you think he could live with himself knowing he failed to protect both of his kits?" The old medicine cat argued.

Twilightkit's eyes narrowed slightly, "But he didn't even try! All he did was just say 'ohh Duskkit, move or you might get eaten' and then he just sat there and watched!" The tears were getting harder to hold back now.

Tatteredleaf sighed and gently stroked Twilightkit's head with her tongue like her mother had been doing. "You're remembering what you saw but what you saw isn't always as true as it may seem. It's all a matter of perspectives, Twilightkit. If you were Duskkit, you were mad at your father and wanted to rebel. If you were your father, you were torn between trying to save one of your kits and risking the other getting killed as well or just sticking to saving one, and if you were you, you were upset as well at your father and saw him sitting there and blocking you instead of helping your brother. As a medicine cat, I've learned that you need to see the story in every cat's paws, which is showing empathy." When Twilightkit shrugged, looking unconvinced, Tatteredleaf let out a weary sigh. "You'll learn with time. Just, try to think of it in your father's paws, okay? Also, I have some more herbs for you, wait right here."

Twilightkit sat up and stretched, watching the medicine cat climb up into a tree hollow and she turned to look around the clearing,

seeing the clan behaving as if nothing happened. And speaking of Jaybounce... she didn't remember ever seeing him around really. I mean, she saw him walk by the nursery a few times but he never checked up on her and Honeydew tensed every time he was near. She remembered their fight but, were they actually done with each other now?

Her thoughts were interrupted by Tatteredleaf as she leaped down and dropped some leaves in front of her. "Do I have to eat them? They always taste so bitter and gross and-"

"Until you're better, yes." The molly interrupted, tearing a few up and slid them closer to Twilightkit.

Twilightkit lapped them up and swallowed back a gag. "But I am better!"

"No, no you're not." Tatteredleaf's voice got more firm and serious as she spoke, almost like she was scolding Twilightkit. "Twilightkit, it's been almost an entire moon since the whole incident and you've barely left the nursery. The only times you have is when Honeydew coaxes you out for food but then you vanish back in the nursery. You also went to Duskkit's vigil but you were so out of it. I get it, you need to grieve and it was traumatizing to watch that happen, that's why your mother and I agreed to let you grieve for this long. But you need to wake up now and live as a kit. Your littermates are worried about you and think something is wrong with you because you just lay there, staring off at the stars. You've missed the three new kits joining– Butterflykit, Caterpillarkit, and Mothkit. They're around your age too and they're quite interested in you and worried as well even though they hardly know you. Plus, Crackedkit has opened his eyes and is talking up a storm!" Twilightkit just shrunk a little, her paws looking very interesting at the moment. "I know you don't want to forget Duskkit, and I'm not telling you should, I just don't want you trapped in that circle of grief, okay? It breaks a cat and well, I don't want you to end up like your father or lose your entire kithood. Go enjoy yourself, okay? That's a medicine cat's order to you. I'll even have Flyingstar enforce that if I have to." She purred softly, nuzzling Twilightkit's cheek. "Now go back to the nursery and let your mother know you're finally ready. If you don't, I'll do it myself. No more being an empty beetle husk."

Tatteredleaf nudged Twilightkit to her paws and she glanced wearily towards the clearing, nervous. She felt another push and hesitantly padded towards the nursery. But instead of rushing there immediately, she looked around and spotted her littermates playing together in a corner of the camp, out of the way. She locked eyes with Dawnkit for a few heartbeats and she offered a small smile and he grinned back, turning to Daykit excitedly to which she also looked towards Twilightkit and Twilightkit's tail curled, hoping she gave the message she was trying to get better now.

They both raced towards her, almost tripping a few warriors and she saw Dawnkit leap towards her, not giving her enough time to prepare for impact. Before she knew it, she was on her back, Dawnkit on top of her, and Daykit pawing at her head.

"You're alive! I mean, you were before, but you were like, in a zone, as Honeydew put it." Dawnkit squeaked excitedly.

"We thought that you'd be like that forever. You were so unresponsive and just oblivious. I wanted to try to put spiders in your fur to see if you'd notice but Honeydew told me no. Just know the temptation was there." Daykit added, purring.

Twilightkit shoved Dawnkit off and she scrambled to her paws, grooming her ruffled fur down. "Sorry. I just..." She trailed off, trying to figure out how she could explain it. "Without Duskkit, I didn't want to escape this little safe space in my mind I guess."

Daykit and Dawnkit's eyes both darkened with grief. "Yeah. I can understand that. Honeydew told us how what you saw is what caused that but well, it was hard to fully understand since we didn't." Daykit murmured, her tail drooping slightly.

Dawnkit cleared his throat and locked eyes with her, "Are you back now? For sure?"

Twilightkit searched his eyes for a few heartbeats, to think of her *actual* answer. It would be much easier to hide away again but her conversation with Tatteredleaf ringed in her head and she couldn't help but turn to look back at the medicine den where the medicine cat was watching. Tatteredleaf gave Twilightkit an encouraging

smile and she turned back to Dawnkit, smiling slightly, "Yeah. I think so."

Dawnkit looked relieved and nuzzled his nose against hers, causing her to smile more. She felt Daykit lean against her and she rested her tail on Twilightkit's back. She knew she'd always miss and grieve Duskkit, till the end of time but... she had her other two littermates who needed her just as much.

"We'll get through this together!" Daykit purred, determination in her eyes and Dawnkit bopped Daykit's nose and giggled. Twilightkit grinned and she laughed as Daykit tackled Dawnkit.

Her ears perked when a breeze blew through the camp– not that any cat seemed to notice– and some leaves rustled. Her eyes locked onto a dark corner of the camp, underneath the random leaf rustle, and when she squinted, there was a figure who seemed around the size of a warrior but she couldn't make out any details. And then she felt her anger for Jaybounce begin to bubble up again although she quickly pushed it back down. When she focused on the area again, it was gone and she frowned.

Blinking, she shrugged and looked towards the nursery. "I'm going to go talk to Honeydew. Tatteredleaf told me I should tell her I'm getting better now."

Daykit and Dawnkit smiled and nodded. "Okay! We'll be somewhere in the clearing if you want to play." Dawnkit said, nuzzling her one more time before tackling Daykit again and running away from her, Daykit right on his tail.

Twilightkit watched them race off and gave a small sigh, turning back to the nursery. She began to pad over when she heard voices from the main 'entrance'. She assumed it was a patrol and began walking again until she heard the familiar voice of her father and her heart dropped.

None of the cats were carrying anything so she assumed it was a border patrol and Jaybounce was mid conversation until his eyes met hers. She shrunk back a little and he seemed surprised, studying her for a few heartbeats. He was about to say something

but she didn't want to speak to him and ran towards the nursery again, not looking back. She wasn't ready to face him. Not now. Not ever.

Honeydew's head lifted as Twilightkit ran in and she frowned when Twilightkit leaned up against her. "What's the matter dear? Did something happen?"

"No. I just..." She trailed off, not sure if she should say and whether it'd make her mother upset or not. "I just saw Jaybounce and got scared." She murmured as her mother wrapped her tail around her.

Honeydew's eyes darkened when she looked outside the nursery. "He didn't say anything to you, right? He left you alone?"

Twilightkit just nodded.

"Good. If he ever lays a paw on you, I want you to let me know, okay?"

"Okay." Something about the tone her mother used made Twilightkit feel uncomfortable or weird but she ignored the feeling.

Honeydew began to groom the top of her head in rhythmic strokes and Twilightkit wiggled out. She was clean enough from Tatteredleaf but her mother pulled her closer and gave her a thorough clean. "How'd it go with Tatteredleaf?" Honeydew asked in between licks.

"It went fine. She told me how I've had my time to grieve and that I shouldn't let myself be trapped in my feelings." Twilightkit said slowly, not sure how much she should share.

Her mother looked at her and she met her eyes. "That's good... Anything else?" She prompted, ears perked.

"*And* she said I need to wake up and be a kit instead of an empty beetle husk." Twilightkit said in a quieter voice.

"Well, are you?" Honeydew raised a brow, and stopped grooming Twilightkit as if she wanted her full attention on Twilightkit's answer.

"...Yes. I think so." As soon as the words left her mouth, Twilightkit could feel Honeydew's loud purr and she nuzzled Twilightkit's small head.

"That's great news! I'm so proud of you." Twilightkit grinned at her mother's praise and she leaned up against her. Things were going to be alright now, surely.

* * *

Twilightkit yawned, opening her eyes and looking around the nursery. Her littermates were still fast asleep and same with her mother. She got to her paws carefully, nuzzling Honeydew quickly, and slipping out of the nursery to the camp's clearing, which she was glad to see that it wasn't too busy. She assumed most of the cats were out on dawn patrols and she was grateful for it, that's for sure.

Looking around the clearing, she recognized a few cats around but most were unfamiliar. She weirdly felt like a stranger in the camp and she was sure that all the other kits already knew every cat in the clan except her.

Twilightkit let out a small sigh and padded around the edge of the clearing till she reached the Training Branches. Staring up at them, she felt a sadness pang her heart. *This is where it all began. All because Jaybounce had told Duskkit not to use them.*

Her tail drooped and she looked towards the sky where clouds were drifting. She hoped he was happy and not *too* lonely all the way up there.

"Hey! You! Twilightkit is it?" An energetic voice she didn't recognize called out, causing her fur to spike.

"Huh...?"

"Oh sorry, didn't mean to scare you. But, *are you* Twilightkit?"

Twilightkit stared at the cat in front of her who seemed to be a bit bigger than her but not nearly as big as a full grown apprentice. Her pelt was a dark ginger and she had bright olive-green eyes. Dark

flecks of a lighter ginger were throughout her entire body and she had a white paw.

"Yeah, I am." Twilightkit shifted slightly and licked down her ruffled fur before turning her attention back to the she-cat.

"Cool! I'm Mothkit. I saw you slip out of the den and figured now was a great time to talk to you since no cat could talk to you during your little trance thingy. I wanted to meet you after the 'Great Twilightkit awakening!' Yknow?" Mothkit said with a joking tone and Twillightkit ducked her head and her ears lowered slightly.

"I see." Was all Twilightkit said, not sure how she felt about this cat.

The kit rolled her eyes and sat down, licking her paw and turning her attention to the nursery where two other unfamiliar kits were playing around. "That's Caterpillarkit and Butterflykit, my littermates. Oh! I should invite them over here."

"Actually it's okay, I can talk to them later-" Twililghtkit began to say but was cut off as Mothkit yowled their names at the top of her lungs. She let out an annoyed huff as the other two came racing over.

"Hi Twilightkit!" One of them called as he raced over. He was dark brown with striped ginger patches and had piercing blue eyes.

"*Hi.*" She murmured, tail tip twitching slightly.

"This is Butterflykit–" Mothkit said, nodding to the other molly who offered her a warm smile. She was ginger and brown with darker speckles around her body and she had friendly yellow eyes. "--And that's Caterpillarkit." She purred, pointing to the tom.

Twilightkit shifted uncomfortably, wanting to get away from these very energetic cats but she didn't want to be rude either. So instead, she braced herself for a long morning.

"Soooo, Twilightkit. What do you like to do?" Caterpillarkit asked, stepping closer and sitting down, flashing her a smile.

Twilightkit shrugged. Most of the time before, she hung out with

her littermates but of course, she hadn't been doing much after losing Duskkit.

Right when she was about to answer, Mothkit jumped in. "She *clearly* loves to play clan! Isn't that right Twilightkit?"

"Er... yeah. Sure." She wasn't sure where Mothkit got that idea since she strongly dislikes playing clan but this was her chance to make friends so...

"Okay! We can play that then!" Caterpillarkit said with much enthusiasm.

"I call being leader!" Purred Mothkit.

Butterflykit rolled her eyes, "I'll take deputy then-"

"No! I choose Twilightkit as my deputy." Mothkit growled.

"That's not fair though! I called it!" Butterflykit protested.

Mothkit's eyes narrowed. "But a leader gets to choose her deputy and I'm Moth*star*. Therefore, *I*, get to pick my deputy."

Butterflykit scowled and huffed, backing off and wrapping her tail around her paws which made Twilightkit feel bad.

"It's okay, really. I can just be a warrior." She said nervously, shuffling her paws. She didn't want to upset Butterflykit or get her to hate Twilightkit

"Uh- no. You don't get to just decline being *the* deputy. That's being dishonorable and disloyal." The ginger molly hissed.

Twilightkit looked down at her paws and mumbled, "*Right. Sorry.*" She was almost positive warriors could decline the position but she wasn't going to argue.

"Okayyy then. I'll take medicine cat." Caterpillarkit said with a shrug and he glanced between his littermates and Twilightkit.

Mothkit purred in approval and climbed up onto the branches and

looked down at the others who all sat down below her. A light breeze blew throughout the camp and cats were quietly talking amongst themselves while Mothkit and her siblings' mother watched them as if there was nothing cuter in all the clans.

"I, Mothstar of MothClan-"

"Why call it MothClan? It's not all about you!" Butterflykit snorted, seemingly still upset about not getting the deputy role.

"I'm the leader and *founder* of the clan? Duh!"

Caterpillarkit let out a sigh as the two began to bicker and he padded next to Twilightkit who was sitting there awkwardly. "Hey Twilightkit. Sorry about them. I think Butterflykit is just jealous that you're suddenly the center of Mothkit's world. She used to be if that wasn't obvious."

Twilightkit slowly nodded but frowned, tuning out the yelling. "Oh, I guess I get that. But I tried letting Butterflykit be the deputy! Why does Mothkit get to decide everything, don't you guys ever stick up for yourselves or tell her no?"

The tom looked at her weirdly for a few heartbeats. "Because she's the oldest? And clearly has authority built into her blood. Do you question cats like Flyingstar when he orders warriors around? Or what about your mother?"

"Well that's different because-"

Caterpillar rolled his eyes. "You shouldn't question cats who lead unless you can lead or do what they do better whether it upsets you or not. That's common sense!"

Was it? She gave a hesitant nod and watched as Butterflykit growled and stormed off to a dark corner of the camp. She met Twilightkit's eyes and gave her a death glare before turning her back towards the others. "Should some cat check on her?"

"Nah, she'll be fine. Come on, let's play!" Caterpillarkit sat back in his place and instantly forgot all about poor Butterflykit.

Twilightkit hesitated but instead of sitting down, started to make her way towards Butterflykit only to stop as a hunting patrol arrived. Her tail shot straight up. She was starving! She told herself she'd apologize to Butterflykit later. Right now Twilightkit wanted a vole or chipmunk.

She bounded toward the pile without a heartbeat and gladly left Mothkit and her siblings behind. Her littermates were much better than them though she couldn't help but think what Caterpillarkit said. And it made her feel upset. Upset and fearful. Should she *really* just follow what any cat says without question? Even if it doesn't seem right?

Her thoughts were interrupted when a cat hovered over her and she studied whoever's paws they were before bringing her gaze up to their face and immediately, she backed up and her ears flattened. Jaybounce's eyes were narrowed as he stared down back at her.

Twilightkit's legs began to tremble and she wished they didn't. She hadn't talked to him since he let Duskkit die and here he was, right in front of her.

"Twilightkit." He said with a stern voice that made her flinch slightly. She looked down at her paws, preparing for a lecture. "Let's talk." Jaybounce said bluntly and reluctantly, she followed behind him to where they had their first "talk". It was the same place he had talked to her after she and Duskkit were learning how to climb.

Sighing, Jaybounce sat down and looked at her, waiting for her to meet his eyes. Once she did, she could already feel fury and hatred bubbling in her throat.

"Listen Twilightkit. I know you hate me right now and that's probably an understatement. But it wasn't *my* fault that your brother died... He just-"

"What do you mean it wasn't your fault? You didn't even try to save him! You saw its eyes. You heard its growl. And all you did was call him over! You didn't even try to grab him or anything." She spat, her voice already choking up. She tried to read his expression but it was blank and he just blinked at her.

"I understand you're frustrated, Twilightkit, but don't put all the blame on me. I called your brother over and warned him to stay close but he refused just to spite me. If he wasn't so stuck up his own tail, he would be here right now." There was a slight annoyance in Jaybounce's voice as if Duskkit were just an annoying bird. Which fueled Twilightkit's anger more.

"No you don't! You don't understand anything! You're just... you're just heartless and careless! You didn't love him. You don't love any of us. Not me. Not Daykit. Not Dawnkit. Not even Honeydew!" Twilightkit yelled, tears streaming down her face. How could any cat be so heartless and not care about his own kits? In a quieter tone, she added, "Just because you lost your old mate doesn't mean you understand anything."

Her father's eyes flashed with anger but he seemed to take a quick breath. Though, he still had a scary tone and she looked away from him. "You're not listening to me. Do you know why you're still alive right now Twilightkit? *Do you*?" Jaybounce forced her to meet his eyes and she shook her head slightly. "It's because you're not a fool. You know better than to just run off like a brainless mouse. You actually think. Most of the time at least. If you were to run after Duskkit like that– if I let you, do you think the fox would have spared you both? Do you think it would have changed its mind because its prey's sister came in?"

"...No."

"If you were hunting and were about to jump on a mouse but a second one appears, would you leave or try to get them both?" Twilightkit looked away, ears flat. She hated how he was right. "*Answer me.* Would you have left them both or caught them both? Or even catch one of them?"

"I would try to get them both. But-"

"Exactly. That fox wasn't thinking that Duskkit actually had a life, just that it needed food for its own life. Welcome to the real world Twilightkit. Sorry that your life nor any other cats' life is all rainbows and butterflies."

Twilightkit's fur bristled but she didn't know how to respond. He was right and he knew it. "I hate you. I wish I never knew you." She growled and kept her eyes down.

"Hate me all I want. It won't change anything though. Your brother will still be dead and the rest of us would have moved on."

If she could claw his pelt off, she would have. It took all her willpower not to try to attack him though it wouldn't do much as she was still pretty small compared to him. But she realized he never said anything about loving any of his kin. "What about the rest of us?"

He looked at her confused. "What do you mean, 'the rest of us?' I'm sure the rest of 'us' will move on as well."

"No. I mean the rest of *us.* Honeydew, Dawnkit, Daykit, *me.* Do you actually love us or are you just saying you do? I mean you haven't talked to Honeydew much." Twilightkit wiped her wet nose and stared up at him, hoping, praying, begging, she didn't know the answer.

But his silence and hesitation answered for him.

Deep down, Twilightkit *knew* the answer. But she didn't want it to be true. Of course he didn't care. She got to her paws and silently walked out of the spot they were talking in.

"Love is a strong word, isn't it?" Jaybounce said as she was heading into the clearing. She paused in her steps but didn't look back. "We throw that word around but no cat knows what it means, right?"

She didn't have time for this and snorted, heading to the nursery. Mentally Twilightkit added *avoid Jaybounce at all costs* to her list of things.

It was still really early but she was mentally drained. Twilightkit would try to hang out with her new friends tomorrow maybe. Or meet Crackedkit. Whatever she chose to do was for later her to worry about. Right now she just wanted to bury her head into her mother's fur and never leave.

As her mind began to replay the day, it went back to what Caterpillarkit said again. *"You shouldn't question cats who lead unless you can lead or do what they do better..."*

Maybe she should follow rather than lead. It seemed a lot easier, that's for sure.